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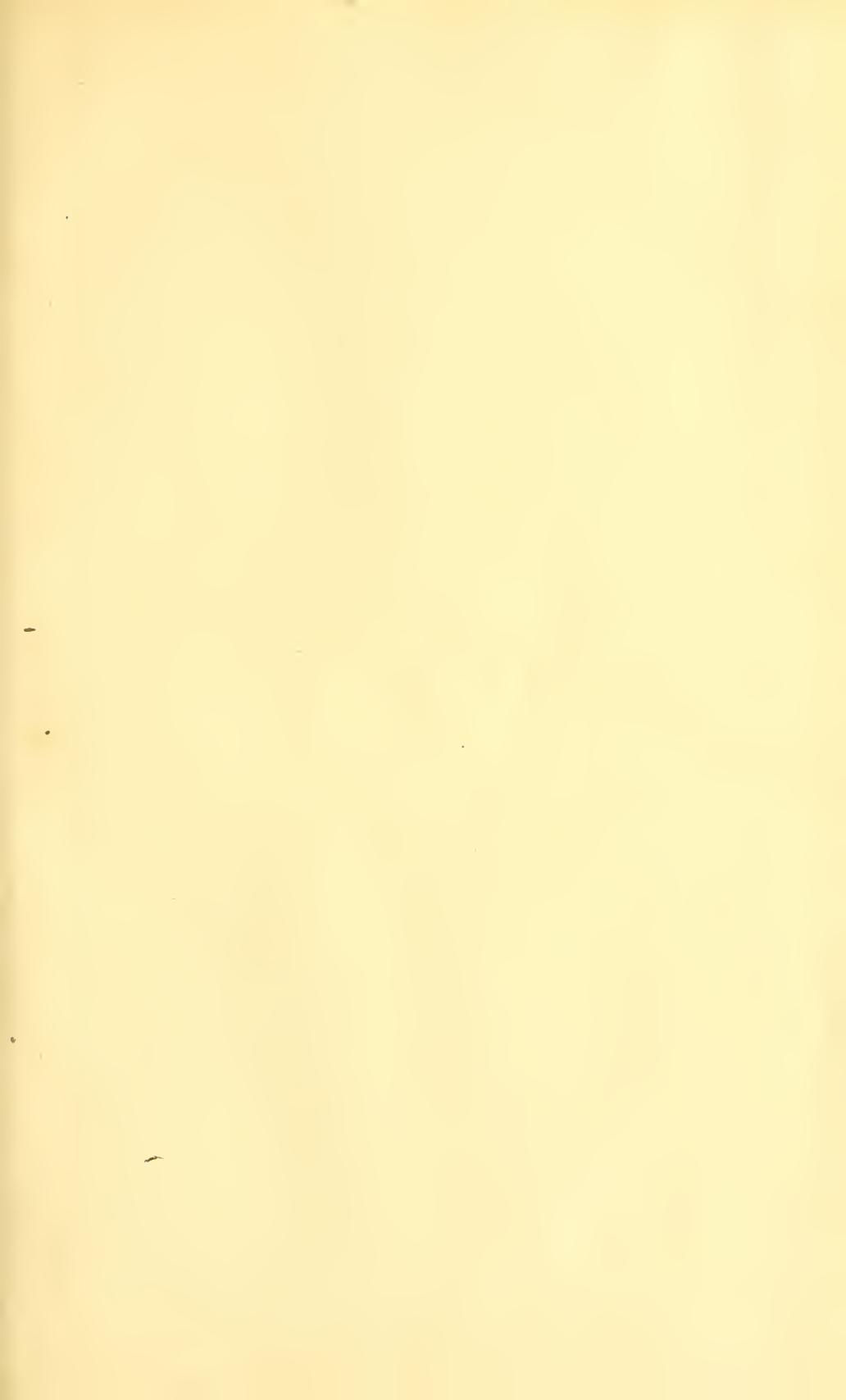
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UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.









NEWBURGH

1783-1883

CENTENNIAL.





REASONS

FOR

# The Centennial

AT

WASHINGTON'S HEADQUARTERS,

NEWBURGH, N. Y.

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Prepared by J. T. HEADLEY,

At the request of the Trustees.



NEWBURGH, N. Y.:  
JOURNAL BOOK AND JOB PRINTING ESTABLISHMENT,  
44 and 46 Second Street.  
1881.

*W. H. W.*

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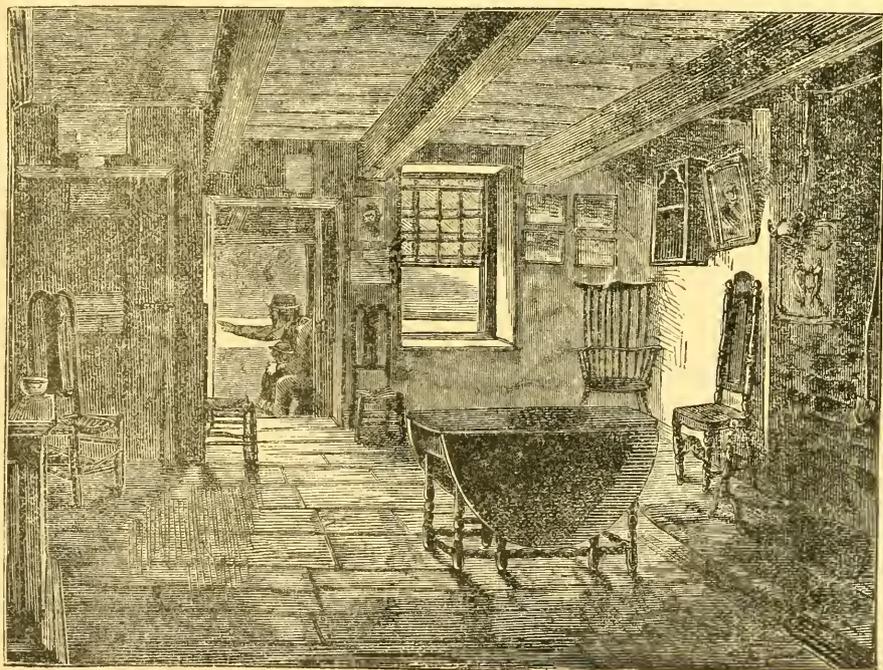
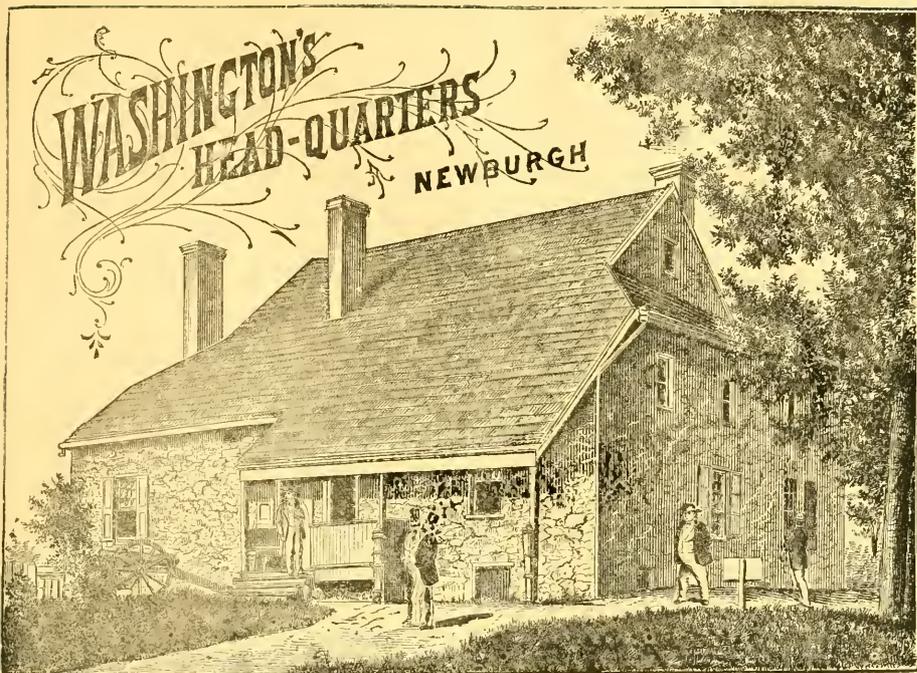
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THE ROOM WITH SEVEN DOORS AND ONE WINDOW



REASONS  
FOR  
THE CENTENNIAL  
AT  
WASHINGTON'S HEADQUARTERS,  
NEWBURGH, N. Y.

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The long list of centennial celebrations that have commemorated the stirring events and noble men of our revolutionary struggle have been not only a proper and well merited recognition of them but have also been of vast benefit to the nation. Amid the mad strife for power and spoils which have been pushing the nation toward destruction they have made the people pause, take a new view of their situation from the standpoint of the revolution, and stimulated a love of country that is far different from the love of political power.

We propose to close the list extending through so many years by a grand centennial in Newburgh in 1883. As the first one celebrated a peaceful event, the declaration of independence in Independence Hall, Philadelphia, so this last will celebrate a peaceful event, the proclamation of peace to the army and its final disbandment. As the first celebrated the birthday of liberty in Philadelphia, so the last should celebrate the birthday of the Republic at Newburgh. As out of gloom and uncertainty as to the future one was born, so out of the deepest darkness and almost despair the other sprang into being. The clangor of arms and thunder of hostile guns heralded neither. As the first was peaceful and yet more momentous than all the battles that followed, so the last was equally peaceful

and yet greater than all the victories that preceded it. Both were moral victories accompanied by none of the display which dazzles the senses and attracts the gaze of the crowd.

Washington's Headquarters in Newburgh, the spot designated for the closing centennial of the revolution, is a quaint old stone building standing on a green bluff overlooking the gorge of the Highlands. Hither Washington led his ragged army from the victorious field of Yorktown and made it his home for more than a year and a half. Burgoyne's army having been crushed at the north and that of Cornwallis at the south, there was left but one large army on our shores, that of Clinton shut up in New York. While Rochambeau stood watch and ward over the south, Washington guarded the north at Newburgh. The Headquarters took in the Hudson River for eight miles to West Point, and the moment Clinton should break through the obstructions across the channel there, he would know it and his army be put in motion.

But as time passed on and it became pretty certain that the war was over, the attention of the army was naturally turned to the form of government to be adopted, and this question became the topic of general discussion, and assumed greater importance as Congress became more corrupt and more and more indifferent to the rights and comfort of the army. It was asked on every side, would it do for the army to disband and leave the destiny of the country in the hands of such a Congress. The terrible state of feeling that existed in the army may be imagined from the following extract from a letter of Washington's to the Secretary of War. He says :

“Under present circumstances, when I see such a number of men goaded by a thousand stings of reflection on the past, and of anticipation in the future, about to be turned on the world, soured by penury and by what they call the ingratitude of the public, involved in debts, without one farthing of money to carry them home, after spending the flower of their days and many of them their patrimony in establishing the freedom and independence of their country, and suffered everything that human nature is capable of enduring this side of death. I repeat it, when I consider these irritating circumstances, without one thing to soothe their sufferings or dispel their gloomy prospects, I cannot avoid appre-

hending a train of evils will follow of a very serious, disturbing nature, and I wish not to heighten the shades of the picture so far as the reality would justify in doing it. I could give anecdotes of patriotism and distress which have scarcely ever been paralleled, never been surpassed in the history of mankind. But you may rely upon it the patience and long suffering of the army are almost exhausted."

How fearfully perilous the state of things must have been to have forced such strong language from the calm and prudent Washington. He knew meetings were almost nightly held by officers high in rank respecting the form of government that should be adopted when peace was secured. At this day it may seem strange that such a question should come up, but it must be remembered that when the colonies took up arms it was at first for a redress of grievances alone. In a short time it changed into one for independence—for a government of our own without any fixed idea as to what character that government should be when freedom was secured. It was time enough to think of that when we obtained our independence. *That* overshadowed all other questions. There is no evidence that such a republic as ours was ever dreamed of at the outset. As far as we can ascertain the general feeling of the statesmen at that time, the opinion was that a government based with some modifications upon that of England would be the safest and best. Nor is this strange—it was the one they had been educated in and been taught to revere, and the blessings and privileges of which they had rebelled to secure. But now as peace seemed close at hand, it was necessary to meet this question fairly and settle it forever. Congress was not to be trusted. To that conclusion almost the entire army had come. What then was to be done? It was resolved without the calling of conventions or farther preliminaries to declare Washington dictator with the design of ultimately making him King. A paper to this effect was carefully drawn up and Colonel Nicola, a venerable officer, to whom Washington was warmly attached, was selected to present it.

One morning Washington was sitting in the old building surveying with an anxious eye the perils that now threatened the country,

when Nicola rode up and requested an interview. He told Washington that he had been intrusted with an important paper by the officers of the army. That it had been prepared with great deliberation, and its contents had received the most careful and serious consideration. The paper, after speaking of the present condition of affairs and prospects of peace, and the necessity of the adoption of a strong government, took up the several forms of government, and discussed them, going over both the good and bad points in each, and finally, in conclusion, declared that a republican government was the most unstable and insecure, and a constitutional one like that of England the most desirable and perfect of all, and offering to place him, as the one most fit, at its head under the title of "Protector," or some other name. As the people might object to the name of King, it should not immediately be assumed. Ultimately it was to be adopted. The anxiety and distress that deepened on Washington's face as he went over the topics one after another, gradually assumed a more serious aspect, but when he came to the offer to make him King it blazed with terrible light, and he exclaimed :

"Sir, with a mixture of surprise and astonishment I have read with attention the sentiments you have submitted to my perusal. Be assured, sir, no occurrence in the course of the war has given me more painful sensations than your information of there being such ideas existing in the army as you have expressed, and I must *view with abhorrence* and reprehend with severity. I am much at loss to conceive what part of my conduct could have given encouragement to an address which to me seems big with the greatest mischief that can befall my country. If I am not deceived in the knowledge of myself you could not have found a person to whom your schemes are more disagreeable. Let me conjure you, then, if you have any regard for your country, for yourself or posterity, or respect for me, to banish these thoughts from your mind."

How like a thunderbolt this proposition seems to fall upon him. He cannot contain his surprise as he looks about him in amazement at this new danger that has opened like an earthquake under his feet. Every line of this letter bears indication of a powerful internal struggle—a struggle to maintain that self-composure and moderation in language which had always dis-

tinguished him. Mastering himself with a strong effort he replies with a severe dignity and stern condemnation that must have overwhelmed the astonished officers. His feelings of great surprise and astonishment give way to "abhorrence." He then takes fire at the insult offered himself, the severe reflection it casts upon his honor, and the implied charge of ambitious views and possible treason to the people, and he "*cannot conceive what part of his conduct could have given encouragement to such an address.*" The next moment his thoughts revert to his country, and "the greatest mischiefs that can befall my country" comes back like a mournful refrain.

Surely no event in the history of our country deserves to be remembered and honored more than this. No battle he ever fought was more fraught with the nation's destinies than this act. No transaction that occurred during that long seven years' struggle is more deserving of commemoration, not only for its grandeur, but as an example to be held up for all time before the youth of this country. But this was not all. Another and a sterner conflict and final victory was before him. He had crushed this first movement with a single blow, but he clearly saw that the feeling which had prompted it was not extinguished; nay, his watchful eye saw that it was on the increase, and the next step would be taken without him, if possible *over* him.

He saw an abyss whose depths he could not fathom, opening at his feet. Never before in the hour of deepest discouragement when retreating from a lost field was he so agitated. He aroused himself, however, to avert the evil. His letters to Congress proving of no avail, and the mutterings of the army growing daily more ominous, he proposed that a committee of officers of high character should be appointed and sent to Congress to see if some measures might not be adopted to remove the deep-seated disaffection and disperse the rising storm. That committee went. It pleaded, it remonstrated, it endeavored to alarm that body, by pointing out the dangerous state of feeling in the army which, if pushed to extremity, would take the matter into its own

hands. But it was all to no purpose, and when that committee returned and reported the utter failure of their mission, the indignation increased tenfold, and Washington became still more alarmed. At length the long expected storm burst. One day an officer handed Washington a paper that had been circulated freely in the army. It was an appeal to it to take matters in its own hands, march on Congress, and obtain its demands at the point of the bayonet. In short, if they were not granted, usurp the government. It appointed a day for the officers to meet in the Temple, as it was called (a large log building erected a couple of miles back of Washington's Headquarters for the use of the army during its long period of idleness), and there decide on the manner in which to proceed.

Washington's face wore an anxious, troubled look as he read it and he sat and pondered long and with a heavy heart over its contents. The terrible exasperating facts it contained were all true and could not be denied. The letter was not signed, but was evidently written by a master hand and was perfectly adapted to secure the end aimed at, which was to arouse the passions of the officers and soldiers to such a pitch that would prove too strong for even the powerful influence of Washington to check. It began with a recital of their wrongs, of the insults heaped on them by Congress, of its cold neglect, of their own forbearance and patience under them, their self-sacrifice and patriotism, and recited the measures they had taken in vain to secure their rights, portrayed in vivid colors the contempt and scorn with which their repeated and earnest petitions had been treated, and finally breaks out, "faith has its limits as well as its temper, and there are points beyond which neither can be stretched without sinking into cowardice or plunging into credulity;" and declared that another step in the patient course they had been pursuing would be ruin forever. "If this," he says, "be your treatment while the swords you wear are necessary to the protection of your country, what have you to expect from peace when your voice shall sink and your strength dissipate by division, when those very

swords, the instruments and companions of your glory, shall be taken from your sides and no remaining mark of your military distinction left you but your infirmities and scars. Can you consent to retire from the field and grow old in poverty, wretchedness and contempt? Can you consent to wade through the vile mire of dependency and owe the remnant of that life to charity which has hitherto been spent in honor? If you can, go and carry with you the jest of tories, the scorn of whigs, and what is worse, the pity of the world. Go, starve and be forgotten." Growing bold in his indignation he swoops down on Washington himself and exclaims, "suspect the man who would advise to more moderation and longer forbearance, let nothing but death separate you from your arms."

These impassioned words fell on the already excited and indignant hearts of the army like fire on gunpowder. Washington gazed with the deepest alarm and gloom at the awful catastrophe that seemed about to overwhelm the country. These brave men whom he had borne on his great heart for seven long years were asked to throw him overboard at last. Must it be then that the bloody and stormy road they had traveled together so long was to end in this frightful gulf in which home and country were to go down in one black ruin? As he looked down into its gloomy depths his heart sunk and he afterward said it was the darkest day of his life. Not when in the gloomy winter encampment of Valley Forge with his half naked, starving army dying around him, did the prospect look so dark as now. No lost battle-field ever bore so terrible an aspect. But what was to be done? He could forbid the meeting, but that would only increase the excitement. The army was in no temper to submit to mere dictation. Besides, he must win back more than obedience—he must regain the confidence and love of the army or all would be lost. With that remarkable sagacity and foresight that has made him the wonder of mankind he simply in an order postponed the meeting till Saturday and selected the number and rank of the officers to compose it. He acted as though he sympathized with

the army, and if there was to be a meeting to discuss measures for its welfare, it was eminently proper that he should attend it. This master stroke discomfited the leaders in their movement. They expected to control the meeting themselves.

In the meantime, Washington summoned to this old building those on whom he knew he could rely, and Putnam and Green, and Knox and Wayne and Steuben and others gathered here in grave and solemn council. The plan for Washington to attend the meeting was approved, and the room in which he penned his immortal address to the army remains just as it was when he wrote it.

So on the appointed day Washington mounted his horse and accompanied by his staff, rode over to the Temple. On the way his face wore an anxious, troubled look. He knew that the crisis of the revolution had come, and his heart was torn by conflicting emotions. Would he be able to crush this perilous movement and allay the rising storm, or would he be overridden and trodden under foot by the excited passions of the army? With these thoughts oppressing his heart he approached the building. The crowd of caparisoned horses in the open space around it and held by orderlies or hitched to the trees, showed that the officers were already assembled. On the slope across a morass in front lay scattered the shanties of the soldiers. His eye rested for a moment on them, and he then dismounted and giving his horse to an orderly entered the building. Every eye turned as that majestic form, with its firm and measured tread, moved toward the raised platform at the farther end of the room. Every footfall echoed clear and distinct on the uncarpeted floor as he slowly passed through the silent throng of officers. Ascending it he turned and gazed a moment on the excited upturned faces, and after saying a few words about the writer of this anonymous appeal, he took out the address he had prepared with so much care. But in the absorption of his feelings in the decisive step he was about to take, he had forgotten his spectacles. Taking them from his pocket he said in a grave, subdued tone: "These eyes, my

friends, have grown dim and these locks white in the service, yet I never doubted the justice of my country." They were simple words, but the suppressed emotion with which they were uttered, and the painful sadness of his face, smote every heart and sent a thrill of the deepest sympathy through the room, and many an eye grew moist and lip quivered.

He began that immortal address by referring to the anonymous writer of the call for this meeting and of the perilous advice it contained, not to sheathe their swords till they obtain satisfaction from the government. Dwelling on the proposition to turn their arms on Congress itself, he burst forth "My God, what can this writer have in view in recommending such measures! Can he be a friend to the army? Can he be a friend to the country? No, he is plotting the ruin of both." He then spoke of the army, and his voice trembled with emotion as he dwelt on their sufferings, devotion and bravery, and of his deep affection for them. He told them how intimately his own fame was bound up in their glory till eyes that had never blanched in the wildest storm of battle overflowed with tears. He closed the touching, noble address in the following language.

"Let me conjure you in the name of our common country, as you value your own sacred honor, as you respect the rights of humanity and the national character of America to express the utmost horror and detestation of the man who wishes under any specious pretence to overturn the liberties of our country, who wickedly attempts to open the floodgates of civil discord and drench our rising Empire in blood. By thus determining and thus acting you will pursue the plain and direct road to the attainment of your wishes—you will defeat the insidious designs of our enemies who are compelled to resort from open force to secret artifice, and you will give one more distinguished proof of unexampled patriotism and patient virtue, rising superior to the most complicated sufferings, and you will by the dignity of your conduct afford occasion for posterity to say when speaking of the glorious example you have exhibited to mankind: Had this day been wanting the world had never seen the last stage of perfection to which human virtue is capable of attaining."

With a low bow he descended the platform and walked out of the building. The moment he disappeared through the entrance Knox sprang to his feet and offered a resolution of thanks to and

of confidence in Washington, which was seconded by Putnam, at the same time declaring that they returned his affection with all the strength of which the human heart is capable. It was carried with a shout of acclamation. Not a voice was raised in remonstrance. The meeting to take into consideration the momentous question should the army usurp the government, had ended in a resolution of confidence in Washington. The crisis had passed, the danger was over and Washington remained more strongly entrenched in the hearts of his soldiers than ever. It was no figure of speech when Washington said the success of the measures proposed by the anonymous appeal would "drench this rising Empire in blood." Civil war would have inevitably followed, the colonies been rent asunder and England easily have recovered her lost possessions and American liberty gone down at least for that century.

Washington rode back to these old Headquarters with a heavier load lifted from his heart than he had ever felt before, and with serene satisfaction received the congratulations of his major generals. There had never been so perilous a battle fought during the long struggle as this one fought by Washington single-handed and alone and without the clash of arms, and no greater victory won, and we believe therefore there is no event or period in our revolutionary history more worthy of commemoration than this.

But this is not all that makes a great centennial here appropriate and worthy to be held. Here peace was announced to the army and a day of jubilee appointed by Washington which ought to be kept in remembrance by the nation forever. Thirteen cannon from old Fort Putnam, at West Point, belched forth their joy, and cannon from these old Headquarters answered. A *feu de joie* was fired by the army drawn up in line, and people streamed along the highway and fields with shouts and firing of guns. At night, fires blazed on the distant mountain-tops and their sides echoed with the sound of fire-arms flashing in the darkness, while shouts rent the air. There was a grand gathering of troops and men,

prayer and thanksgiving were offered and hymns of rejoicing sung, and the loud chorus rose strong and great against the sky.

And all the continent shall sing,  
Down with this earthly king!  
No king but God!

Let this day be remembered. There is another reason why this year should be the last great centennial. Here the old continental army was disbanded. Drawn up in line the proclamation of Congress and the farewell order of Washington was read and they broke ranks for the last time, the band playing the mournful tune of "Roslin Castle," the strains of which they had been accustomed to carry their dead comrades to the grave, and scenes of sorrow followed that should make these grounds sacred to every patriotic heart.

Thatcher, a surgeon in the army who was present at the final disbandment, says :

"Painful was the parting; no description can be adequate to the tragic exhibition. Both officers and soldiers long unaccustomed to the affairs of private life were turned loose upon the world. Never can the day be forgotten when friends and companions for seven years in joy and sorrow were torn asunder without the hope of ever meeting again, and with the prospect of a miserable subsistence in the future."

Major North, another witness of the principal scene, says :

"The inmates of the same tent for seven long years grasped each other's hands in silent agony. To go they knew not whither; all recollection of the art to thrive by civil service lost, or to the youthful never known. Their hard earned military knowledge worse than useless, and to be cast out into the world by them long since forgotten. To go in silence and alone, and poor and helpless. It was too hard. Oh, on that sad day how many hearts were wrung. I saw it all, nor will the scene be ever blotted from my view."

No, and may it never be blotted from that of the country. Let it all be brought back again, and these grounds in the centennial year be once more peopled in imagination with these brave and suffering men—without pay, without decent clothing, laying down their arms, relying solely for justice on the sacred promise of Washington. This spot, consecrated by such great events, made holy by the lofty patriotism here exhibited and speaking to

our sympathies by the tears and suffering they have witnessed, should not only be held in affectionate remembrance, but a monument should crown it, towering over the Hudson from the gorge of the Highlands, and on it be inscribed the events of the memorable year of 1783.

These Headquarters are now owned by the State, and stand just as they did when Washington occupied them, empty save of revolutionary relics, and surrounded by cannon gathered from almost every battle-field of the republic.



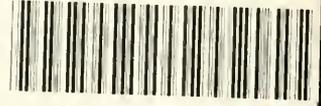








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